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2026 Census topic review: Phase two directions

Overview of phase two of the 2026 Census topic consultation and the content being considered further.

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Key outcomes

- Over 1,000 pieces of external feedback were considered as part of the two-phase consultation process.
- 32 topics were assessed for addition, change or removal in phase two consultation and review.
- 17 topics, comprising of 5 new topics and 12 existing topics with one or more changes, have progressed to the development and testing stage. These topics are across a majority of themes.
- Three topics are still under consideration for removal, and one topic will be recommended to move back to a ten-year collection cycle and be collected again in the 2031 Census.
- 37 topics will be retained in their current form.
- Topics that are tested will not necessarily be recommended to the Australian Government for inclusion in the 2026 Census.

Content change being considered for 2026 Census at the end of each consultation phase(a)

	Inclusion	Change(b)	Removal
Phase one outcome(c)	12 topics	15 topics	5 topics
Phase two outcome(d)	5 topics	12 topics	4 topics

- Content changes will continue to be refined before a recommendation is made on topics for the 2026 Census.
- Some existing topics have more than one change being assessed.
- Income was flagged as a change to existing content in the [2026 Census topic review: Phase one directions \(/statistics/research/2026-census-topic-review-phase-one-directions\)](#) publication. Income is being considered as a removal in this publication as the question will be removed from the Census form if the direct collection of income is replaced with administrative data. It is listed as a topic for removal for phase one and phase two in this table to allow comparability.
- The Industry of employment topic was not being considered for change after phase one, but has since been added to the shortlist following the phase two process. The topic is included in the number of changes to existing content for phase two only.

Background

The Census of Population and Housing provides a snapshot of Australia. It shows how our nation changes over time, helps estimate our population and informs critical decisions that guide our future. The next Census will take place in 2026.

Every Census, the ABS undertakes a review to inform a recommendation to the Government on the topics for the next Census. The review of topics includes extensive public consultation, stakeholder engagement and testing.

The review of topics for the 2026 Census included two phases of public consultation:

- Phase one: 28 February to 28 April 2023 - understanding what information the public would like the ABS to collect in the Census.
- Phase two: 27 July to 8 September 2023 - consultation on topics being considered for inclusion, change or removal from the 2026 Census.

The ABS has considered the feedback received during both phases of consultation. However, there are always more requests for information than can be accommodated in the Census.

The addition of any new or changed content to the Census needs to be carefully considered to ensure that the public benefit of the data outweighs the cost to the Australian taxpayer of developing the questions, collecting the data and then processing it. The ABS also needs to consider the need for comparability of data over time, the burden on Australian households of answering questions on the Census, and whether a longer or more complex Census form will decrease the quality of the data collected. Due to this, content changes need to be prioritised and existing topics considered for removal for the 2026 Census.

The [2026 Census topic review: Phase one directions \(/statistics/research/2026-census-topic-review-phase-one-directions\)](/statistics/research/2026-census-topic-review-phase-one-directions) publication provides a summary of the feedback received during the first phase of consultation, including the key themes that emerged and the shortlist of topics that have been considered during the second phase of public consultation and review.

The ABS has made decisions regarding the number of topics that proceed to the development and testing stage to fit within available resources and timeframes. The content changes that are proceeding to the next stage of the topic review process provide the greatest public benefit when considered against the cost and complexity of data collection.

The ABS will continue to refine the list of content through the development and testing stage before determining the combination of content changes. This is to maximise the value of 2026 Census data and maintain a high level of public support for the Census.

The ABS thanks everyone who provided feedback during both phases of consultation, and for Australia's ongoing support of the Census. This concludes the public consultation stage of the 2026 Census topic review process. The ABS will publish the final list of topics on the ABS website in late 2025.

New content still being considered

There are five potential new topics that are still being considered as part of the 2026 Census topic review process. These topics were assessed as having strong public value and, after considering the feasibility of collection, were a higher priority on balance than other topics considered.

The ABS will continue to shortlist topics during the next stage of development and testing. Topics that are tested will not necessarily be recommended to the Australian Government for inclusion in the 2026 Census.

New topics still being considered for 2026 Census

Theme	Topic
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural identity
Location	Main reason for moving in last 12 months
Population	Gender
	Sexual orientation
	Variations of sex characteristics

More information

As part of the development of these topics, the ABS is specifically investigating the following options:

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural identity

The ABS has assessed that there is significant public value in adding new content to reflect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural identity more fully. The ABS expect this topic cannot be completely implemented by the 2026 Census, as a statistical standard and statistical classification will need to be developed in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The ABS is investigating what data could be collected in the 2026 Census that delivers value for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as well as other data users, even if it requires refinement in the 2031 Census.

The ABS will work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and representatives, including the ABS Round Table on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Statistics, during the development and testing stage to inform the direction for this topic.

Gender, Sexual orientation and Variations of sex characteristics

Information on the value of including these topics in the Census was detailed in the [2026 Census topic review: Phase one directions](https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/research/2026-census-topic-review-phase-one-directions) (<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/research/2026-census-topic-review-phase-one-directions#population>) publication. The ABS is working closely with the LGBTIQ+ Expert Advisory Committee for the 2026 Census during the development and testing stage for these topics.

Main reason for moving in last 12 months

This topic could provide information for several policy areas, including climate, housing, labour force and education, and will support improved population forecasting and planning. The ABS is investigating whether the topic can still meet data needs if it is only collected on the online form, due to space constraints on the paper form.

New content no longer being considered

There are seven new topics that are no longer being considered for the 2026 Census.

While all topics included in the shortlist after the phase one consultation have significant public value, the ABS has needed to make decisions regarding the number of topics that proceed to the development and testing stage to fit within available resources and timeframes. The topics that have not progressed are the least likely to be feasible for collection in a Census context and would require more time for development than is available for the 2026 Census.

The ABS is considering other ways to provide more data on these topics where possible.

New topics no longer being considered for 2026 Census

Theme	Topic
Cultural diversity	Ethnic identity
Disability and carers	Additional measure of disability
Household and families	Shared care of children
Housing	Dwelling occupancy status
Transport	Journey to education (Mode of travel to education institution and Name and address of education institution)
Other topics	Household energy use
	Impact of natural disasters

Additional measure of disability

Since the 2006 Census, the ABS has collected information about people with a [core activity need for assistance \(/census/guide-census-data/census-dictionary/2021/variables-topic/disability-and-carers/core-activity-need-assistance-assnp\)](#). This largely includes people with a profound or severe disability. Feedback indicated that the current approach excludes a significant proportion of Australians with disability and collecting additional data would enhance the development and design of policies and programs for all people with disability.

The ABS considered options to meet this information need in the Census. In assessment, the topic revealed significant feasibility concerns and complexities in collecting additional data on disability in a Census context. The ABS determined that the topic would require multiple questions, in addition to the existing questions that collect information about people with a core need for assistance. There were also concerns regarding people's interpretation of the question/s, and therefore the consistency of responses.

The ABS will continue to look for opportunities in the lead up to the 2031 Census and beyond to explore additional questions that could be asked to collect additional measures of disability in the Census.

Dwelling occupancy status

The 2021 Census collected information on the number of dwellings that were [occupied and unoccupied on Census night \(/census/guide-census-data/census-dictionary/2021/variables-topic/housing/dwelling-type-dwtd\)](#). This was informed by observations made by staff in the field, self-reporting by respondents, and administrative data. However, this does not include the reasons why a dwelling is unoccupied. Feedback indicated the need for additional information on dwelling occupancy to identify the reasons why residential properties are unoccupied, and where people own more than one dwelling to understand the use of additional dwellings. This would be useful to inform policy and planning for Australia's housing needs.

The ABS considered options to meet this information need in the Census. In assessment, significant feasibility concerns and complexities were identified for collecting this data on the Census form. This included the need to ask multiple questions to determine the reason for why a dwelling is unoccupied, and that these questions would need to be asked for all persons over 15 years of age. This would significantly increase cost and respondent burden.

Ethnic identity

Feedback raised through public consultation indicated there is a desire for data on ethnic identity because it collects information on the culture people identify with. While the 2021 Census collected information on ancestry, this information may reflect a person's origin and heritage, rather than a culture they strongly identify or have connection with.

The ABS specifically sought feedback during the second phase of consultation on use cases for collecting information on both ethnic identity and ancestry, and the impact if the question on ancestry was replaced with ethnic identity. Feedback during this consultation supported the inclusion of both topics, and there was strong support to enhance the Ancestry topic.

The Ethnic identity topic and enhancements to the Ancestry topic both proceeded to testing. However, despite testing multiple concepts around ethnic identity, including “ethnic group/s”, “cultural background”, “ethnic and cultural heritage” and “the culture you belong to”, there were significant issues. Most notably, the testing showed that the public is unlikely to have a consistent understanding of what ethnic identity is, or the difference between ethnic identity and ancestry. The ABS determined that due to these complexities collecting both ethnic identity and ancestry on the same form is not feasible for the 2026 Census. Due to the strong support for the retention of the Ancestry topic, the topic of Ethnic identity will not proceed further in the development and testing stage.

The ABS will continue to focus on testing enhancements to the Ancestry topic to maximise public value.

Household energy use

The need for information on household energy use was identified through public consultation. Feedback indicated data on source or connection to utilities, energy consumption and the energy efficiency of appliances would provide benefit to Government policies and programs, including supporting the transition to a net zero carbon emission future.

The ABS considered options to meet this information need and determined that the Census is not the most appropriate mode to collect data on this topic. The ABS has also considered what data is available, or likely to be available, through other data collection activities and administrative data. For example, the [Administrative data snapshot of housing \(/statistics/people/housing/administrative-data-snapshot-population-and-housing-experimental-housing-data/latest-release\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/housing/administrative-data-snapshot-population-and-housing-experimental-housing-data/latest-release), released 29 August 2023, provides experimental information about dwelling electricity consumption recorded in administrative data. The ABS anticipates that other data sources will become available in the future that will progressively meet the data need.

The ABS will continue to investigate other ways to provide more data related to household energy use. This includes investigating other administrative data sources or undertaking targeted data collection activities if required.

Impact of natural disasters

Census data is already used extensively in frameworks and strategies related to natural disaster risk and recovery. The ABS considered feedback raised through public consultation that highlighted the importance of collecting additional data specifically on the impact natural disasters have on the Australian population. Stakeholders indicated there are significant social, environmental, and economic ramifications when these events occur, and that this information may assist in informing preparedness, mitigation, adaptation, response, recovery and reconstruction.

The ABS considered options to meet this information need in the Census. This included the feasibility to collect data on what types of natural disasters a person has been impacted by and mitigations taken to reduce the impact of future natural disasters.

The ABS determined that the most feasible option to meet this information need for the 2026 Census is to include a response category relating to natural disasters in the potential Main reason for moving in last 12 months topic. This topic would support several policy areas, including climate and natural disasters, and has proceeded to the next stage of development and testing.

Journey to education (Mode of travel to education institution and Name and address of education institution)

Travel for educational purposes makes up a significant portion of peak hour travel. The ABS considered feedback raised through public consultation that, when combined with journey to work data, this information would improve

understanding of traffic flows and transport patterns. Stakeholders indicated this information is important to inform strategic models used in transport planning.

Previous testing identified significant feasibility concerns and complexities in collecting data on this topic in a Census context. The ABS considered options for the 2026 Census to address these feasibility concerns. This included limiting the scope of the question to school students only and to only collect the suburb of the educational institution attended.

When the revised scope was assessed, the ABS determined that the topic would still require multiple questions, increase respondent burden and require significant resources to develop, process and disseminate data on the topic.

Shared care of children

The ABS has received feedback that there is a need for information on parents or children who live across multiple households as part of shared care arrangements. This feedback highlighted there is no data collected which specifically identifies shared care arrangements or the amount of time spent in each household. Data on this topic would enhance understanding of the social and economic implications of shared care arrangements and help inform policy development and service delivery.

Previous ABS surveys, research and testing have demonstrated complexities in efficiently collecting accurate data on shared care arrangements. In assessment, the ABS identified significant feasibility concerns and complexities in collecting data on this topic in a Census context. The topic would require multiple new questions and changes to existing questions. There were also concerns regarding the accuracy of responses collected on a form that the household completes themselves.

Removal of existing content: status

There were four existing topics identified for potential removal from the 2026 Census following the first phase of public consultation. This included Number of children ever born, Number of employees (employed by owner managers), Number of motor vehicles and Unpaid work – domestic activities. For these topics, alternative data source(s) were identified that could potentially meet the data need, or the ABS assessed that the topic could move to a ten-year collection cycle. The ABS specifically sought feedback on the impact of removing these topics from the 2026 Census during the second phase of public consultation.

Additionally, the ABS identified that administrative income data could be used in Census outputs and replace the existing income question on the Census form. In the [2026 Census topic review: Phase one directions \(/statistics/research/2026-census-topic-review-phase-one-directions\)](#) publication, the ABS highlighted that administrative income data variables had been added to the 2021 Census outputs. The ABS appreciated that data users would need time to investigate the utility of this data for their purposes, and sought feedback via a separate four-month consultation process as part of the [Administrative data snapshot of population and housing \(/about/data-services/data-integration/integrated-data/administrative-data-snapshot-population-and-housing\)](#) release.

To date, the ABS has identified one topic that will be retained and one topic that will be recommended to move to a ten-year collection cycle and next collected in the 2031 Census.

The outcomes of the remaining three topics are still under consideration. The final direction for these topics will consider consultation feedback and the relative priority of each topic against other content changes being considered for the 2026 Census.

Status of existing topics identified for removal following phase one

Theme	Topic	Status
Income, work and service with the Australian Defence Force	Income	Under consideration.(a)
	Number of employees (employed by owner managers)	Will be retained, alternative data sources do not currently meet data need.
Population	Number of children ever born	Will be recommended for the return to a decennial collection with removal for 2026 Census.
Transport	Number of motor vehicles	Under consideration.
Unpaid work and care	Unpaid work - domestic activities	Under consideration.

a. Includes reviewing feedback from the [Administrative data snapshot of population and housing \(ADS\)](https://consult.abs.gov.au/census/administrative-data-snapshot-of-population-and-hou/) (<https://consult.abs.gov.au/census/administrative-data-snapshot-of-population-and-hou/>) consultation process open until 15 December 2023.

Number of children ever born

The 2021 Census collected information on the number of children ever born to each female aged 15 years and over. Prior to 2011, the question was asked every ten years, and this was sufficient to meet the data needs to inform population projections. The topic was collected in the 2011 and 2016 Censuses because of decisions to not make any topic changes for these Census cycles.

The ABS communicated during the 2021 Census content consultation that the topic would be retained in 2021 to align with international reporting, but that the ABS would consider moving back to the ten-yearly cycle for the 2026 Census. In line with this, this topic was identified for potential removal in the 2026 Census.

The ABS considered feedback received during the second phase of public consultation and, while there is a data need, the case for collecting the topic every Census was not as strong as other topics being considered for change or inclusion. There may also be opportunities to inform data needs through linked administrative data in the future. The ABS will be recommending the Government return to a ten-year collection cycle for this topic, with the topic next collected in the 2031 Census to align with international reporting requirements.

Changes to existing content: status

The ABS is considering changes to 12 existing topics for the 2026 Census.

There are 11 content changes, across 9 topics, that are no longer being considered.

The ABS assessed shortlisted changes against the pre-determined criteria before prioritising the changes. Where a topic had more than one change shortlisted, the ABS assessed each change separately.

The ABS has made decisions to prioritise which changes should proceed to the next stage of development and testing to fit within available resources and timeframes. During assessment and prioritisation, the ABS considered:

- feedback on proposed changes received during the second phase of public consultation
- operational considerations such as complexity, cost and time constraints
- respondent burden
- accuracy of responses
- the need for comparability of data over time.

The ABS will continue to shortlist topics during the next stage of development and testing. Not all changes that are tested are guaranteed to be included in the 2026 Census.

Status of existing topics identified for change following phase one

Topic(a)		Proposed change(b)	Status
Cultural diversity			
	Ancestry	Increase the number of ancestries collected from two to four to better reflect cultural diversity.	Progressing
	Country of birth of parents	Update the question design to be more inclusive. Remove gendered language.(c)	Progressing
	Main language other than English used at home	Remove 'at home' context. Collect all languages used.	Not progressing
	Proficiency in spoken English	Ask the question of more people.	Not progressing
	Religious affiliation	Update the question design to support more accurate data collection.(d)	Progressing
Education and training			
	Attendance at an educational institution	Update response categories to count the number of children who are home schooled.	Progressing
Health			
	Long-term health conditions	Update response categories to include 'liver disease' and 'migraine' to collect a wider range of long-term health conditions.(e)	Progressing
Household and families			
	Household and family relationships	Update the question design to collect more diverse family structures and update to gender-inclusive language is still being considered. Update to collect kinship care arrangements is not being considered further.	Partially progressing
	Marital status	Update to collect de facto relationship status in this topic (in addition to the Household and family relationship topic) is still being considered. Update to collect 'separated from de facto' is not being considered further.	Partially progressing
	Persons temporarily absent on Census night	Asking questions on new Census topics will be considered once the topics recommended to Government are determined. Asking other existing Census questions is not being considered further.	Partially progressing
Income, work and service with the Australian Defence Force			
	Hours worked	Change from hours worked to usual hours worked.	Not progressing
	Industry of employment	Update question wording to improve alignment with the Labour Force Survey.	Progressing
	Labour force status	Update question wording and response categories to improve alignment with the Labour Force Survey is still being considered. Collect data on joblessness is not being considered further.	Partially progressing
	Status in employment	Collect data on employment arrangements is not being considered further.	Not progressing
Population			
	Sex	Update question to specifically collect sex recorded at birth and update response categories to improve data quality.	Progressing

Topic(a)		Proposed change(b)	Status
Transport			
		Update response categories to include more contemporary modes of travel is still being considered.	
	Mode of travel to work	Collect data on how a person 'usually' gets to work or collecting additional working from home information is not being considered further.	Partially progressing

- Excludes topics with minor changes that occur every Census for online supplementary questions (used to improve coding of Industry and Occupation topics), and instructional or explanatory text included on the form.
- Further information on proposed changes, including feedback received through the phase one consultation, is available in the [2026 Census topic review: Phase one directions \(/statistics/research/2026-census-topic-review-phase-one-directions\)](https://statistics/research/2026-census-topic-review-phase-one-directions) publication.
- The need to also collect sex and/or gender of the parent/s was considered. No strong case was identified to collect this additional information.
- The ABS is testing the change of question wording to "do you have a religion" and using a free text field for responses.
- There were more requests for new long-term health conditions than can be accommodated in the question. The long term-health conditions 'liver disease' and 'migraine' were short-listed based on the burden of disease and prevalence rates.

More information on topics partially progressing or not progressing

Household and family relationships

The ABS considered several changes to the Household and family relationships topic to understand more complex household and family structures, including diverse families and kinship care arrangements.

In assessment, significant feasibility concerns and complexities were identified in collecting data on kinship care arrangements. This included collection efficiency, as well as respondent burden and accuracy of responses. Changes to the topic to collect kinship care arrangements are not being considered further.

The ABS is testing the collection of additional relationships within the household to better reflect the diversity of family and household structures. The ABS is also testing the use of gender-inclusive language in this question.

Main language other than English used at home and Proficiency in spoken English

The ABS is no longer considering changes to the Main language other than English used at home topic.

The ABS considered several changes to better reflect the linguistic diversity of Australia following feedback received during the first phase of consultation. This included the removal of the 'at home' context and collection of all languages used, in addition to the main language used.

Feedback received through the second phase of consultation provided some support for the changes, however there were concerns that the change would impact quality and utility of the data and comparability of data over time. The ABS considered the feedback received, as well as the size and complexity of the changes. Based on this, the ABS determined that changes to this topic will not be considered further.

Changes to the Proficiency in spoken English topic to ask the question of more people were also considered. The ABS assessment is that the additional respondent burden is not outweighed by the data need and this change is not being considered further.

Marital status

Feedback raised through public consultation indicated that the current registered marital status question should be expanded to collect data on de facto relationships, including whether someone has separated from a de facto relationship.

The Census does produce data on current de facto relationships. This is based on the question relating to household and family relationships. The ABS is investigating options to improve data on de facto relationships.

The ABS also considered options to collect data on people who have separated from a de facto relationship. In assessment, the complexity of collecting this information without compromising the quality or comparability of existing marital status data has resulted in the ABS not considering this change further.

Mode of travel to work

Feedback raised through public consultation requested the inclusion of more contemporary modes of travel and indicated that asking for the method of travel for one day in a week may not reflect regular travel behaviour. The ABS considered options to address this feedback to ensure the data collected continues to meet user needs. This included options to collect data on how a person usually gets to work or additional working from home information.

In assessment, significant feasibility concerns were identified when assessed, including conceptual issues with the understanding of 'usual' and the size and complexity of the changes required. Changes to the question design will not be considered further.

The ABS is testing changes to the existing response categories to include more contemporary modes of travel.

Persons temporarily absent on Census night

The 2021 Census collected information about people who are temporarily away from home to determine the usual composition of a household and generate accurate estimates of the usual population in an area. The current Census questions about people temporarily absent from the household include name, sex, date of birth or age, student status, relationship to others in the household, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander origin.

The ABS considered options to include other existing questions for people temporarily away to improve data quality for household variables. The ABS assessed the benefits of collecting more data, as well as the collection efficiency, respondent burden and accuracy of responses. The ABS identified feasibility concerns and complexities, and determined that other existing questions will not be asked, in addition to the six questions already included.

The ABS is assessing whether any new topics recommended for inclusion in the 2026 Census should be asked of persons temporarily absent from the household on Census night.

Work topics

The 2021 Census collected data relating to work. This included questions for Labour force status, Status in employment, including Incorporation status and Number of employees (employed by owner managers), Hours worked, Occupation and Industry of employment topics.

The ABS specifically sought feedback through the second phase of consultation on the value of the Census collecting information on joblessness and employment arrangements/job security. The ABS considered feedback received and assessed the feasibility of these potential changes. As part of the review process, the ABS also investigated options to change the Hours worked topic and whether any questions relating to work could be adjusted to improve alignment with the ABS Labour Force Survey.

The ABS has assessed that improving the existing questions is a higher priority than introducing the new questions. For this reason, collecting additional information on joblessness and employment arrangements/job security will not be considered further. There were also concerns with the conceptual understanding of changing the Hours worked topic to collect 'usual' hours worked. This change will not be considered further.

The ABS is testing changes to the Labour force status and Industry of employment topics to improve the quality and utility of the data. As part of testing, the ABS will review whether these changes impact respondent understanding of other work topics.

Existing topics with no proposed change for 2026 Census

The ABS is planning to retain the following topics in their current forms. You can find more information about the public value of these topics in the [2021 Census topics and data release plan \(/statistics/research/2021-census-topics-and-data-release-plan#topics-included-in-the-2021-census\)](/statistics/research/2021-census-topics-and-data-release-plan#topics-included-in-the-2021-census) publication.

The number of existing topics with no change will increase as the ABS continues to refine the topics being considered for change during the development and testing stage.

Existing topics with no proposed change for 2026 Census

Theme	Topic(a)
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status
Cultural diversity	Australian citizenship
	Country of birth
	Main language other than English used at home
	Proficiency in spoken English
	Year of arrival in Australia
Disability and carers	Need for assistance in self-care, body movement or communication
	Unpaid assistance to a person with a disability, health condition or due to old age
Education and training	Highest level of schooling
	Highest non-school qualifications
Housing	Housing costs
	Landlord type for rented dwellings
	Number of bedrooms
	Other non-private dwelling information (including the topics of Address, Name, Type, Number of persons resident and Residential status)
	Other private dwelling information (including the topics of Location, Structure and Residential status)
	Type of tenure
Income, work and service with the Australian Defence Force	Hours worked
	Main tasks in occupation
	Number of employees (employed by owner managers)
	Occupation
	Service with the Australian Defence Force
	Status in employment
Location	Address on Census night
	Internal migration (Address one year ago)
	Internal migration (Address five years ago)
	Usual residence at Census time
Population	Date of birth or age
	Name
Transport	Name and address of workplace attended
Unpaid work and care	Unpaid care of children
	Unpaid work - voluntary work for an organisation or group

a. There may be minor changes to these topics. Minor changes occur every Census for online supplementary questions (used to improve coding of Industry and Occupation topics), and instructional or explanatory text included on the form.

Summary of 2026 Census topic consultation and review

In total, the ABS considered over 1,000 pieces of feedback as part of the two-phase consultation. This included 260 submissions received during the phase one consultation window and 213 submissions received during the phase two consultation window. The ABS also considered:

- Submissions received from the 2021 Census consultation for the six shortlisted topics for further consideration and testing, but not included on the form: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural identity, Gender, Household and family relationships, Journey to education, Sexual orientation and Smoking status.
- Correspondence received by the Australian Statistician and Ministers since the 2021 Census topic consultation process closed in June 2018.
- Feedback and outcomes of recent ABS consultations and statistical standard reviews, including on Religious Affiliation and Family Standards.
- Recommendations from parliamentary inquiries.

- Feedback received via stakeholder meetings throughout the consultation and review process.

The [2026 Census topic review: Phase one directions \(/statistics/research/2026-census-topic-review-phase-one-directions\)](/statistics/research/2026-census-topic-review-phase-one-directions) publication contains further detail on phase one submissions or requests.

Overview of phase two public consultation

Phase two of the 2026 Census topic consultation was open from 27 July to 8 September 2023. This consultation invited feedback on proposed changes to Census content.

Supporting information was available on the ABS website, along with a media release and a live webinar with a question and answer session. The consultation process was promoted through social media, outreach by ABS staff, and direct contact to people and organisations that had expressed interest in Census topics. This included those who made a submission in phase one and indicated they wanted to be notified of outcomes.

The [ABS Consultation Hub \(https://consult.abs.gov.au/census/2026-census-topic-consultation-phase-two/\)](https://consult.abs.gov.au/census/2026-census-topic-consultation-phase-two/) was the primary way that submissions could be made. Submissions were also received via email. The ABS engaged with key stakeholders to clarify information and sought advice on some topics before finalising topic directions.

To assist the ABS in making an informed assessment, the Consultation Hub questionnaire included specific questions to support the development of quality submissions as well as the option to provide any other feedback that would assist the ABS in its assessment. Specific questions included, but were not limited to:

- Do you currently use [Topic] data from the Census?
- Would the alternative data source listed meet your data needs if this topic was removed from the 2026 Census? (Please explain why/why not)
- Describe the expected impact for you or your organisation if this topic was collected/was changed/was not collected in the 2026 Census.

Submissions received during phase two consultation

The ABS received 213 submissions during the consultation window. Submissions were received from all levels of government, businesses, community groups, advocacy groups, industry bodies/associations, academics and individuals. Submissions from individuals accounted for 57.7% of total submissions.

Phase two submissions received during consultation window(a) by submitter type

Submitter type(b)	Number of submissions	%(c)
Academia/educational institution	9	4.2
Australian government	6	2.8
Business	4	1.9
Community organisation	25	11.7
Individual	123	57.7
Industry body/association	3	1.4
Local government	12	5.6
Non-government organisation	7	3.3
State and territory government	10	4.7
Other(d)	14	6.6
Total	213	100.0

- Includes submissions received during the consultation period, 28 July to 8 September 2023, via the Consultation Hub and email.
- As reported by the primary submitter. Excludes additional individuals and organisations listed in collaborative submissions.
- Any discrepancies between totals and sums of percentages are due to rounding.
- Includes organisations where the type of organisation was not specified by the submitter.

Twelve submissions received during the consultation window had multiple individuals and/or organisations contributing to the submission. Some peak bodies also made submissions on behalf of their members.

Topics covered during phase two consultation

The ABS specifically sought feedback on 10 topics. These were Ancestry, Ethnic identity, Labour force status, Main

language other than English used at home, Number of children ever born, Number of employees (employed by owner managers), Number of motor vehicles, Religious affiliation, Status in employment and Unpaid work – domestic activities. Of these, Religious affiliation was the most common topic included in submissions, followed by Ancestry and Ethnic identity.

Phase two submissions by topics where feedback was specifically requested(a)

Topic	Total
Ancestry and Ethnic identity(b)	67
Labour force status	23
Main language other than English used at home	42
Number of children ever born	40
Number of employees (employed by owner managers)	15
Number of motor vehicles	35
Religious affiliation	101
Status in employment	24
Unpaid work - domestic activities	42

- a. Some submissions provided feedback on more than one topic.
- b. Ancestry and Ethnic identity topics have been combined as the Consultation Hub questionnaire included specific questions that requested feedback on these topics together.

While the ABS advised that feedback was not required for other shortlisted topics, there was an option in the Consultation Hub to provide feedback if desired. The most common topics included in submissions where feedback was not specifically requested were Gender, Sex, Sexual orientation, Variations of sex characteristics, and Attendance at an educational institution.

Some submissions suggested content that was out of scope of the phase two consultation. This included topics that were requested in the first phase of public consultation but were not shortlisted, new topics not previously requested, and submissions that were related to other ABS data collections or Census collection procedures. These submissions have been referred to the relevant areas of the ABS for further consideration where relevant.

Assessment of topics

Feedback received during the phase two consultation informed the final assessment of the public value criteria for each topic. These criteria are:

1. The topic is of current national importance.
2. There is a need for data at the national level, and either the local level or for small population groups.
3. There is likely to be a continuing need for data on the topic following the Census.
4. There are no other suitable alternative data sources or solutions that could meet the topic need.

The ABS also assessed collection feasibility of each topic during phase two using the following criteria:

5. Data on the topic can be collected efficiently.
6. A representative of the household would be willing and able to answer questions on the topic for each member of the household.

Once all criteria were assessed, the ABS considered:

- whether the public benefit of collecting data on the topic would outweigh the cost of collection
- the impact on data comparability between Censuses
- the burden on Australian households completing the Census, and
- the likelihood that the new or changed topic would be developed within the required timeframes for the 2026 Census.

Next steps

This publication concludes the public consultation phase of the 2026 Census topic review process.

The ABS will continue to refine the shortlist of potential content changes during the development and testing stage, prior to making a recommendation to Government in mid-2024.

The ABS will continue to engage with advisory bodies throughout this stage to seek guidance on the design and testing of potential content. This includes the ABS Round Table on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Statistics and the LGBTIQ+ Expert Advisory Committee for the 2026 Census.

Proposed content is tested extensively through focus groups and cognitive interviews before the ABS determines which content changes should be recommended to the Government for their decision.

Following Government decision on topics for inclusion in the 2026 Census, the Census and Statistics Regulation 2016 will be amended and tabled in both houses of the Australian Parliament.

The ABS has the authority to determine the questions that are used to collect data on the topics prescribed in the Regulation. This means some shortlisted changes to existing topics can be made by the ABS without requiring Government decision.

The ABS will include the topics recommended to Government and the refined list of other content changes in a large-scale test in 2024. The ABS will also commence focus group and cognitive testing of Census forms used in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and for people who are 'sleeping rough' on Census Night.

The ABS will publish the final list of topics on the ABS website in late 2025, including the new topics and changes that do not require a topic amendment in the Regulation. This publication will also provide information on the data products, data outputs and data release timetable.

Data downloads

Census topics 1911-2021

[↓ Download XLSX](#)
[62.61 KB]